



INDO-JAPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

India and Japan: The Intriguing Story in the Indo-Pacific



by
Dr. Uma Maheswari



INDO-JAPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

**India and Japan:
The Intriguing Story in the Indo-Pacific**

**by
Dr. Uma Maheswari**

PREFACE

The Prime Minister of India Hon'ble Mr. Narendra Modi touched the right chords when during a recent telephone call with the new Prime Minister of Japan Mr. Fumio Kishida invited the latter to visit India; and this is probably going to take place in the first half of 2022, commemorating with the 70th Anniversary of the establishment of bilateral relations on April 28, 1952. It is quite striking as to how these two nations have come to be such close friends and presently strategic allies in spite of taking different and divergent positions during the Cold War.

In one sense it can be argued that the security and strategic challenges facing India and Japan are quite different or dissimilar; and in another it can be forcefully argued that the two countries are indeed boxed into a same environment of issues that cannot be shrugged off easily. It is in this context that the Resource Paper by Dr. Uma Maheswari on 'India and Japan: The Intriguing Story in the Indo-Pacific' is not only timely but also sets the parameters of discussion of students and professionals in international relations and area studies. In a straightforward fashion the author has taken the reader through nearly seven decades of a partnership that has rarely been discussed in academic or intellectual circles. The real "intrigue", as seen in Dr. Uma Maheswari's discourse, is not how policy makers built on a friendship based on commonalities; but in how to manage a relationship in spite of differences!

Dr. Uma Maheswari is Professor and Head of the Department of Politics and Public Administration at the University of Madras. In academics for close to three decades she has a Ph.D in Politics and Public Administration from the University of Madras and her Master's and Bachelor's degrees from the Presidency and Ethiraj Colleges respectively. As a teaching faculty Dr. Uma Maheswari handles a broad spectrum of subjects like Public Policy, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Diplomacy and International Political Economy. The author Dr. Uma Maheswari's research interests are also varied having been a recipient of both major and minor projects from different Central agencies like the University Grants Commission, Indian Council of Social Science Research, Bureau of Police Research & Development. A regular participant at national and international conferences pertaining to Political Science, Public Administration, Public Policy and International Relations, she has recently conducted forty online refresher courses in Political Science and International Studies for Teaching Faculty all over India sponsored by the Union Ministry of Human Resources Development as a part of 'Swayam'. Currently she is engaged in a team project on "rural development" under 'Rashtriya Utthachar Shiksha Abhiyan', by Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India.

Enjoy the read....

October 2021

Dr. Sridhar Krishnaswami

Former Senior Journalist with The Hindu
in Chennai, Singapore and Washington

India and Japan: The Intriguing Story in the Indo-Pacific

Introduction

India and Japan share an incredible story of being “unique countries” with a mix of ancient history, tradition and rapid modernization. The two countries are trusted partners in many International forums pursuing transformative & multifaceted relationship over the years. Historically India and Japan have always embarked on initiatives which ensured stability and prosperity of the region and the World.

Diplomatic relations started with the signing of peace treaty on 28th April, 1952. Well it was during the 1990's; complimenting its economic liberalization policies that India became a market for Japan. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's visit to India in 2000 strengthened the relationship. He along .with Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee established the “Global Partnership between Japan and India”, and in 2006 the Japan-India Relationship elevated to the “Global and Strategic Partnership” with a further upgrading in 2015 as “Special Strategic and Global Partnership”. Both Abe and Modi wished to transform the relations and named it as “Japan and India Vision 2025 - Special and Global Partnership working together for peace and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific and the World”. In 2018 it was the resolution to work towards a “free and open Indo-Pacific”. Further Japan following America's diplomatic advances in the subcontinent a closer proximity developed between them.

No wonder the stage is set right now for the 100th Prime Minister of Japan Mr. Kishida to bring “polite and tolerant politics” to his leadership and

protect the nation's geopolitical interest with focus on the economy. The Indian leader Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi has already turned the table with the plans to celebrate 70th anniversary of Diplomatic relations with Japan in 2022. How far can they enhance the cooperation in Indo-Pacific?

The Setting

Continuing their century old ties both the countries have had common pledges for “partnership for prosperity” and have been trying to accomplish this under the aegis of committed leadership. This is quite evident with a long standing partnership as a crucial pillar for the “free and open Indo-Pacific Vision”. The “influence of the two seas” speech by the longest serving Prime Minister Abe to the Indian Parliament in 2007 is a prelude to the intriguing story in Indo-Pacific. India's geo-strategic relation with Japan may be seen as a partnership with another “ancient culture” in the region. In 2008 both the countries introduced various frameworks of security and defense dialogue including “2+2 meeting”, annual defense ministerial dialogue and Coast Guard to Coast Guard Dialogue. There was also synergy between “Act East” policy and a “Partnership for quality Infrastructure”.

The usage of “Indo-Pacific” as a single strategic construct includes the contiguous waters of the western Pacific and Indian Ocean. This construct has gained recognition in the recent times with the shift in the geopolitical centre of gravity of this region. Further this term gives varied inference to different people. It is evident from the Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi's Shangrila Dialogue in 2018. He had clearly described the geographical reach of India's idea of the Indo-Pacific starting from Africa to the America's which covers both Indian and Pacific Ocean, in tandem with that of Japan.

The focus of the Indo-Pacific initiatives is on connectivity, enhancing maritime security, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation and cyber issues.

The countries India, Japan, Australia and US have affirmed a shared commitment to maintain and strengthen a rule based order in the Indo-Pacific in which all nations are sovereign, strong and prosperous. It also reiterates the shared support for a free, open and inclusive region that fosters universal respect for International Law, freedom of navigation, freedom of the skies and sustainable development. The main focus of the Indo-Pacific is based on the oceans, which is the common thread that connects all countries which includes India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The maritime relations primarily occupy the most important strategic positions amongst them in the Indian Ocean. India as a practice conducts the review of India's opportunities and challenges in the Indo-Pacific Region wherein Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Seychelles, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Britain and the United States all participate.

Amongst the medium power countries there are high expectations for Japan to assume a Comprehensive Leadership role in the region. Currently with the change of leadership, Japan is well positioned to continue engaging with likeminded states on a range of issues in order to support regional stability. The geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific Region also reflects evolving policy debates regarding how to address security concerns without jeopardizing economic relations in the region. It is in this context Japan had influenced the US to adopt "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" and other regional actors such as Australia, India and ASEAN have all introduced their own Indo-Pacific Strategies.

The Plot

The change of narratives from "Asia-Pacific" to "Indo-Pacific" evidenced the increasing dominance of Indo-Pacific democracies and their profound engagement in reshaping the security architecture through bilateral, trilateral and multilateral agreements. The globalization, trade dependence

and seamless connectivity of the maritime domain have indeed brought out this paradigm shift. This Indo-Pacific region comprising of six seas and 24 nation states have sought to create a connected multipolar region with a commonly agreed international norms, rules and practices. Despite the differences in the perception of “Indo-Pacific” the countries in the region are rallying to bring in a meaningful partnership. In recent times, Australia, US & India have intensified the economic and defense dialogue on Indo Pacific with Japan, and also initiated parallel trilateral dialogues amongst themselves.

For instance in the year 2019 the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Transpacific Partnership (extension of TPP*) looked more of Asia Pacific than Transpacific agreement. There were eleven signatories which included China. In November 2020 the CPTPP signatories agreed to sign Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which included all ten members of ASEAN plus China but India and US are not part of it. These agreements do not truly refer to the prospects of Indo-Pacific.

Currently the gesture of China, Taiwan and UK to join CPTPP has raised the alarm for Japan as it is now holding the chair. The negotiations represent a tricky path ahead. It is assumed that Japan will use the strategy of negotiating with Taiwan and UK to clear the route for US entry to CPTPP table. On the other hand the economic benefits of Japan in RCEP are far greater than being in CPTPP. It is known fact that Japan has the largest trade partnership with China. On the other hand India has opted out of RCEP in November 2019 in the middle of the negotiations as it faced trade deficit vis-a-vis with eleven of the 15 countries. In this scenario Japan has strongly desired India to come back to free trade framework and strengthen the Australia-India-Japan security network vis-à-vis the rising Chinese military pressure in the Indo-Pacific. Australia too has conveyed the same desire to reaffirm the need to keep up the spirit of Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US and QUAD. It is therefore a time to exercise caution by both Japan and India as

China's overwhelming presence in RCEP and the steps it would follow to become a regional hegemony in the future.

Now turning the attention is the new defense agreement in the region the "AUKUS" by US, UK & Australia to maintain the "free and open Indo-Pacific" with nuclear powered submarines. This clearly captures the plot of the well-developed democratic states to counter China's growing power. The formation of "QUAD" and "Five Eyes" (post 2000) after the Indian Ocean Tsunami and World War II era is overwhelmingly focused on China. In 2019 the US House of Representatives agreed to the entry of India, Japan and South Korea with the five eyes to maintain peace, rule of law in the Indo-Pacific Region. The creation of AUKUS has allowed Australia to acquire from US & UK the nuclear powered submarine technology which was possessed by US, UK, France, China, Russia and India only. The QUAD brought out how India and Japan had designed their own plot to deal with China and its subsequent venture to upgrade the QUAD partnership.

China's rapid military development had posed acute threat to India and Philippines which have active maritime and border disputes. It is feared that China's growing missile arsenal would wipe out America's bases in Asia during "opening hours" of any conflict. Realizing the sensitivity of the region, India and Japan have strongly welcomed the AUKUS deal even though they were excluded. It has definitely shown a strong sign of the US deterrence to confront China though other Indo-Pacific countries expressed their deep concerns.

The Conflict

The post-Cold War seemed to have a battle of "Beijing Consensus vs. the Washington Consensus". There is talk of "China Model", "Belt and Road Initiatives" and "The String of Pearls". The Indo-Pacific has not only emerged as an economic hub instead it has become a strategic nerve of the World. Any miscalculation could trigger a global economic recession and push the region as a whole into a nuclear flashpoint or both.

China as a rising superpower and its sphere of influence in Indo-Pacific region is of immense importance in any political forum. There is a talk of “Malacca Dilemma” as the Strait of Malacca is the bottleneck for China as it is a trade route for 85% of its oil imports. US & its allies have maintained its dominance over the Pacific by navigating high seas and offering trade concessions to East Asian Countries. It also supports them through military deals and guarantees. The US gesture of allying with nations that control key straits in the region, has maintained its deterrence against Chinese ambitions. This is hence termed as US “pivot to Asia”. If the US loses its competitive edge, there is no doubt that it would lead to retaliation heavily.

Another great challenge in the Indo-Pacific is to maintain freedom to navigate and freedom of the skies as the world’s busiest container ports are in this region and a huge portion of Global Maritime Trade transit these waters. Japan, Republic of Korea & China each have overlapping claims in the East China Sea. Japan has a card to play in this crucial area and promote conditional engagement with China - it has to maintain candid relations with US, be firm with China and offer room for cooperation by putting itself in a centre of network of partners from Australia to India, South East Asian Countries to Britain and France.

The politics of Indo-Pacific has become intense with BRI and Maritime Silk Road since the announcement by Chinese President Mr. Xi Jinping. This accelerated India’s role in the region as a major South Asian +Naval Power and introduced strategic projects such as “Mausam, SAGAR, IONS, BIMSTEC” and other bilateral projects. Looking into the prevailing conditions, India should adopt mutually respected regional rules-based order and not have selective way of conduct like some others do. The Malabar Exercises in which navies of Japan, India & US participate should also think of including Australia. On the other hand the bilateral exercises with ASEAN countries should give a green signal to Vietnam and the

Philippines. The Indo-Pacific as a political entity has a case of two rivalries on either end of the spectrum. In the Western Pacific the rivalry between US and China and in the Indian Ocean Sino-Indian competition shapes the strategic calculations. The distinctive rivalries and the development in their relations would set the clock of future geopolitics in this region.

The Resolution

The United States under President Mr. Barack Obama and currently President Joseph Biden have made Japan as the first nation of contact on issues of foreign policy pertaining to the Indo Pacific, and not without good reasons. Both the countries have a multilateral cooperation and the formation of QUAD has reemphasized the exclusive role that Japan could and should play. The US-China rivalry is not only limited to issues in military but also of values and ideology. US-Japan seem to have a shared value of holding back China. The signing of COMCASA is a “milestone” in the Indo-US relations. The American analyst, Mr. John Arquilla has commented that in the present globalized era victory mostly depends upon whose story wins rather whose army wins; the diplomacy practices in Indo-Pacific would help in gauging the future of each nation. The balance of power in the Indo-Pacific will rest upon the responses of major powers of the region vis-à-vis the major South East Asian States.

India and Japan cannot forget two periods, the uneasy 19th century where Japan and China had frequent conflicts and 1962 India-China war. Japan in the post cold war revised the Yoshida Doctrine and accordingly modernized its military. In response to North Korea issue in 1998 it developed its own surveillance satellite and BMD. In terms of military expenditure Japan stands sixth in the world and higher than that of India. The regional conflicts in India prompted the need to acquire nuclear weapons. The recent recognition by US to support India’s claim for a permanent seat in the UNSC shows the status of India in the current World Politics.

Even though US provides the stimuli to both the nations to counter China's rise, India and Japan have to boost up their relations with convergent focus. India and Japan are natural allies strategically located on opposite flanks of Asia. They have a nostalgic past tracing its roots to Buddhism in the 6th century. Their cultural heritage from India extends to Sanskrit influence on the Japanese Language. The visits of the monarch and longest serving Prime Minister Mr. Abe added the limelight to this story of great connect and contact. The India Japan Industrial Competitiveness Partnership established between METI and DIPP in the year 2019 has revitalized the Indian Business. It is the largest provider of ODA in India. JETRO has further strengthened collaboration between Indian and Japanese companies.

This intriguing story of this age old friendship could be rightly concluded with the impressions of Rory Medcalf in his book titled, "Contest for the Indo-Pacific - Why China won't map the future" published by La Trobe University Press in 2020. He points out that China's own flaws, the way it goes about its business and the growing awareness of the shortcomings of BRI, are likely to limit Beijing's capacity to dominate the future of the region. He envisages the importance of "Solidarity "amongst India, Japan, Indonesia and Australia. He gives policy prescriptions in the context of Indo-Pacific relations that a fertile time for diplomatic initiatives led by middle players such as Australia, Japan, India, Singapore and Indonesia.

The Indian Diaspora in countries of Indo-Pacific, specifically America, is not only a source of India's Soft power but also an agent of soft power. The Indian and Japanese Diaspora should take this valued relationship to greater heights by a sense of belonging, goodwill and respect for each other's culture and civilization. They have a purpose of extending this intriguing story to ensure global peace and harmony.





INDO-JAPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

No. 21, Kavignar Bharathidasan Road, Teynampet, Chennai 600 018.

Tel: 91-44-2435 4779 / 4855 6140 E-mail: indo-japan@ijcci.com Website: www.ijcci.com